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For Richard and the Right

CHAPTER 1. Friar Tuck's Captive.

"So! A true shot, Roger Derwent. Right, fair in the clout the shaft is stuck. At five-score yards a good shot."

"A woodman's mark at woodman's distance, captain," replied Roger Derwent, a good-looking, stalwart North countryman, one of the latest recruits to Robin Hood's band. "Yet I cannot equal the best of the men of Sherwood Forest."

"Few can equal the best men of Sherwood at archery, good Roger," said the outlaw chief; "but you promise well to do so in time. With daily practice, you should, a month hence, be able to split a willow wand at the same distance."

"Twill need more than a month's practice to hit a peeled willow wand at five-score yards," returned Derwent. "Twould look but a white streak at such a distance. Nevertheless, I will try my hardest to accomplish the feat."

"You will succeed," pursued Robin Hood. "Your eye is true, and your hand firm and steady; but methought we were to see some play with the quarter staves. Will no one venture a bout?"

"I have challenged all and sundry," exclaimed Little John, who was

seated under a spreading chestnut-tree; "but, save Much the Miller, who is now rubbing some oil on his bruises, none would venture a bout with me."

"Where is Friar Tuck?" asked their leader. "He would not hesitate, methinks, for, if I mistake not, he gave you so shrewd a tap on your skull during the last bout between you that your head rang for a day afterwards."

"Nay, it rang not!" exclaimed Will Scarlet.

"How know you that?"

"It cannot ring because it is cracked."

There was a shout of laughter at this sally from the assembled outlaws, and Little John grasped his staff and shook it at Will Scarlet.

"It is your pate that will be cracked," he exclaimed wrathfully, "an you are not careful."

"Worthy Little John, I shall be most careful," laughed Will Scarlet.

"'Tis passing strange that Friar Tuck is not here," said Allan-a-Dale. "He is not wont to be absent when there is sport toward—"

"And a fine fat buck roasting at the fire," added another.

"No doubt the worthy priest is at this present moment keeping vigil and fast in his cell," said Roger Derwent.

Scarcely had he ceased speaking when a loud shout from some yeomen, who had been out gathering dry wood for the fires, announced the arrival of the very individual they were talking about.

The other "Robin Hood" for this month is

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entitled

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"Make room, my merry men!" came the command in Friar Tuck's rolling voice. "Room for your father confessor and his prisoner. Cry welcome once more. I come, noble captain, like an eagle, with my prey in my clutch."

The fact of the burly friar comparing himself to an eagle was too much for his comrades, and as he made his way through the ring he was greeted with a tremendous roar of laughter.

But their laughter he did not heed as he appeared in majestic triumph, his staff in one hand, and in the other a halter, one end of which was fastened to the neck of his unfortunate captive.

This same captive of the holy friar merits some short description. He was a tall, thin, old man, who, however, by the habit of stooping, had lost much of his actual height.

His features were keen and regular, with an aquiline nose and piercing, black eyes; his high and wrinkled forehead and long, grey hair and beard might have been considered as handsome had they not been the marks of a race which, during those dark ages, was alike detested by the poor and persecuted by the greedy nobility.

The Jew—for he was one of that nation—was dressed in a plain russet cloak of many folds, covering a dark purple tunic.

He had large boots lined with fur, and a belt round his waist, which sustained a small knife and a case for writing materials, but no weapon. His headgear consisted of a high, square yellow cap of peculiar fashion, assigned to his nation to distinguish them from Christians.

"Where is Allan-a-Dale?" shouted the victorious priest. "He shall chronicle me in a ballad? By Saint Dunstan, never was there a more apt theme for exalting valour!"

"How now, Sir Priest?" exclaimed Robin Hood. "What is the reason of all this outcry? Hast put a Norman baron and all his retainers to flight? Where are your other prisoners? And, in the name of Saint Nicholas, who is this one?"

"A captive to my sword and to my lance, noble Robin Hood," replied

Friar Tuck; "or, I should rather say, to my bow and to my quarter-staff."

"His name?"

"Solomon of Sheffield. A rich Jew, as ye all know well, and for whom I shall demand high ransom ere he is set at liberty."

"One poor miserable Jew," cried Little John, with a scornful laugh. "Truly a doughty deed."

Friar Tuck turned angrily upon the giant.

"Cease thy prating," he exclaimed, "and talk not of that which is above thy comprehension. Know that I put to flight all Solomon's retainers ere I made him my prisoner."

"A Jew's retainers," laughed Little John. "By my faith, one would need only to shoot an arrow across their path and they would wait for no more. They have no more stomach for fighting than the Jew himself."

"For the love of Heaven!" ejaculated the poor Jew. "Will no one take me out of the keeping of this madman?"

Friar Tuck turned upon him angrily, but a gesture from Robin Hood checked the outburst that rose to the priest's lips.

"Let us hear when and where you found this prisoner of yours," commanded the outlaw chief.

"'Tis easily told," replied Friar Tuck. "I had spent the night in pious meditation and fasting in my cell at Copmanshurst—"

"No matter for that," interrupted the chief. "Give us only the story of how you captured the Jew."

"I was coming to that," grumbled the friar. "Feeling a-hungered after my long fast, I wandered forth in search of some roots that might serve as a breakfast for a hermit"—here the priest's glance wandered towards the fat buck that was nearly roasted—"when in a forest path I came upon this Jew and his following."

"One ancient servitor, worthy masters," protested the Jew, "who rode off in fear and trembling at the threats of this—holy man. We had lost our way in the forest—"

"Peace, Jew, interrupt me not," cried the friar. "Suffice, then, that

having seen his retainers driven off, this same Solomon of Sheffield rendered himself my prisoner, rescue or no rescue. He was mounted upon a mule, which, as ill-fortune would have it, escaped. I trow that Solomon himself would also have found a means of absenting himself, but that I did reason with him as a man of peace, and so brought him hither."

It may seem strange that the Jew, being apparently harmless, should have been treated to such usage; but, as we have intimated, every man's hand was against the race in those days, and even Robin Hood, fair minded enough in most things, thought no shame of harrassing men such as Solomon, who, while lending money, often did so at such extortionate rate of interest as to cripple their victims financially for all time.

"'Tis well," said Robin Hood, when Friar Tuck ceased speaking. "Solomon of Sheffield shall be bestowed in safety for the present; and it would be well, Jew," he added, frowning upon the cringing captive, "that you thought of your ransom in the meantime. Food shall be given to you, and you shall be treated well while you are with us; but I warn you that it will be an evil hour for you if you attempt to escape. Think, therefore, of an offer; and now, as our midday repast is ready, let us to the feast."

The fat buck was well cooked by this time, and the jovial outlaws sat down under the shade of the greenwood trees, while the three who acted as cooks sliced off portions of the savoury meat and handed them round.

Forks there were none in those days; a hunting-knife and a horn or wooden spoon served all purposes, while great slices of rye bread did duty in most cases as platters.

When the meal was finished, and they had rested awhile after their labours as trenchermen, Robin Hood sent for the Jew.

"How now, Solomon?" he cried; "have you thought yet of what ransom ye are prepared to offer us?"

"Of a truth, worthy outlaw, I have been so distraught with agony and fear

that I have not been able to give the matter a thought," replied Solomon of Sheffield; "nor, indeed, do I see how it is possible for me to pay anything but the smallest sum in ransom, for I have had great losses of late—great and terrible losses."

"We have heard like stories many times before."

"Even this morning I have lost more than would have been sufficient to pay my ransom," continued the Jew, "by reason of the action of yonder brawling and turbulent priest."

"Have a care, Jew, how you use such terms to a churchman of the Christian faith," interposed Friar Tuck angrily, "or, by Saint Dunstan, you will yet find that your skull may be cracked. What have you lost through act of mine? A mule in none too good condition, and an old saddle."

"Sir Priest," replied the Jew, "there was a bag containing a hundred crowns strapped to the saddle of that mule, and that sum is now lost to me for ever; and, by my father Abraham, I could ill afford to lose so much."

The friar's face was a study on hearing this statement, and his vexation was added to by the laughter of his companions.

"By my faith!" he exclaimed, "that is a loss indeed—to me. To think that such a goodly sum has slipped through my fingers. I will instantly go and search through the forest, for the animal may yet be straying at no great distance from where the encounter took place."

"I think you may save yourself the trouble, good Tuck," said Robin Hood, "for the mule would probably follow its companion on which the servant was mounted, and I doubt not the money is safe enough now in the servant's pouch."

"I fear it may be even as you say," replied the friar sadly.

"Nevertheless, we will consider that hundred crowns, Solomon, in dealing with your ransom," pursued the outlaw chief, "for it may possibly be that the sum is lost to you. And, as you seem loth to name the amount of your ransom yourself, why, I must e'en do so. You

say that you know for certain, Friar Tuck, that your captive is wealthy?"

"Ay, that I do," replied the priest. "Is he not Solomon of Sheffield, rich enough to redeem the captivity of the ten tribes of Israel who were led into Assyrian bondage? I have heard from those in whose word I can put faith that his house in Sheffield is so full of gold and silver as is a shame in any Christian land."

"Is that so? Then, friend Solomon, we can't let you off with less than five hundred crowns, and this redemption money shall be placed in our hands ere you are set free."

"A sentence! a sentence!" exclaimed the band of outlaws. "It is a just sum."

"The God of my fathers help me!" said the Jew. "Will ye bear to the ground an impoverished creature? A beggar's staff must be my portion through life, supposing I were to pay you a fifth of that sum."

"Falsehoods will not help you, Jew," said Robin Hood sternly, knowing full well that Solomon was lying. "Five hundred crowns is the sum named, and you must pay it."

"Ah! courageous sir, have mercy on me!" cried Solomon. "I am this day childless, and will ye also deprive me of the means of livelihood?"

"Childless! How so?"

"My daughter—my beloved Miriam—has been carried off by Guy Montferris, the Baron of Roystone, to serve him in his household. Oh, Miriam, apple of my eye! were each leaf on that tree a hundred crowns, and each hundred crowns mine own, all that mass of wealth would I give to know truly what is thy fate, and where thy villainous abductor has thee in durance."

"Carried off by the Baron of Roystone!" exclaimed Robin Hood, his brow darkening. "The most licentious and cruel of Prince John's myrmidons, and one who is an especial favourite of the prince. I remember once to have seen your daughter, Solomon—a handsome, dark-haired damsel."

"One of the most beautiful of her race," replied the Jew. "It is her beauty that will be her undoing if she

be not rescued—for the baron will demand a great ransom. Ichabod! Ichabod! the glory hath departed from my house."

"Comrades," said Robin Hood, looking round, "the old man is but a Jew, nathless his grief touches me. Deal uprightly with us, Solomon. Will paying this ransom of five hundred crowns incommod thee greatly?"

Solomon, recalled to think of his worldly goods, the love of which contended even with his parental affection, grew pale, stammered, and admitted he would have some ready money left after it was paid.

"Well, go to—we will not reckon with thee too closely," said Robin Hood. "Without treasure thou mayest as well hope to redeem thy child from the clutches of Sir Guy Montferris as to shoot a stag-royal with a headless shaft. I will reduce thy ransom by one hundred crowns, then, so thou wilt now have to pay us but four hundred."

"I thank thee—I thank thee, noble outlaw," cried the Jew, throwing himself on the ground at Robin Hood's feet. "And if thou could'st but gain tidings of my lost child for me, willingly would I double that amount, though I be reduced to beggary by so doing."

"Tidings of your child! But have you not just said that she is in the power of the Baron of Roystone? 'Twill not be a difficult matter to find him."

"Ah! you do not understand," pursued Solomon. "Already I have appealed to the baron, but he denies all knowledge of her whereabouts. He reviled me openly, called down the curse of Egypt on my tribe, and swore that he would have me cast into prison if I dared to assert that it was he who carried my daughter off."

"Did you witness the act?"

"No. 'Twas done in the dead of night. But an old woman, my daughter's attendant, recognised the face of the baron."

"I fear, then, you have no proof to bring forward that would be heeded," said Robin Hood, "for the word of an old Jewess, a mere servitor, would not be listened to."

"Alas! that is true."

"Your daughter, I take it, went not willingly. For damsels do not always confide their love-affairs to their parents."

"Insult her not by such a supposition, noble Robin Hood," exclaimed the Jew. "I have good reason to know that Mirian held this same Baron of Roystone in the utmost loathing and contempt."

"Then your only hope, Solomon, is to appeal to Prince John," replied the outlaw chief. "It is to his interest at present to keep on good terms with those of your race, for he is sorely in need of money. And remember, Solomon, he is not above taking a bribe, an you go the right way to work in offering it to him. Let it be in the shape of a loan, and tell him you will take his princely word as to repayment, and will not ask for a quittance. Rest assured in that case that the money will be regarded in the light of a gift. Prince John loves the glitter of silver shekels; so hasten, good Jew, to make your crowns chink in his ear."

"But how can I, most courageous and noble sir, if you will still hold me a prisoner?"

"Prince John will be in York in two days' time," said Robin Hood, "so you cannot see him before then. In the meantime you can send to Sheffield for the amount of your ransom."

Solomon groaned deeply, and began to wring his hands, and to relapse into his state of desolation and despair. But the leader of the Sherwood foresters led him aside.

"I will advise you well, Solomon," he said, "what you will do in this matter. My counsel to you is to seek the prince, and he may, from interested motives, befriend you. If he will not, then come again to me, and fear not that I will hold you to ransom a second time."

"But how shall I satisfy the prince's greed?"

"That you can easily do," said Robin Hood sternly, "for think not that I am blinded by your pretexts of poverty. I am intimately acquainted, Solomon, with the very iron chest in which you keep your money-bags. What! know I not the great stone beneath the elm-

tree that leads into the vaulted chamber under your garden at Sheffield?"

The Jew grew as pale as death.

"But fear nothing from me," continued the outlaw chief, "for we are of old acquainted. Do you not remember the sick archer named Strongbow whom your fair daughter Miriam redeemed from the gyves at Sheffield, and kept him in your house until his health was restored, when you did dismiss him recovered, and with a piece of money? Usurer as you are, you did never place coin at better interest than that poor silver mark, for it has this day saved you four hundred crowns."

"You mean—"

"I mean that I myself will pay your ransom, for the loss must not fall upon my band of followers."

"Nay, that shall never be!" cried Solomon, moved by Robin Hood's generosity. "I swear by the God of my fathers that if my daughter is returned unharmed to my house, I will on that day present your men with eight hundred crowns. But art thou he whom we called Robin Strongbow?"

"I am Strongbow," said the captain, "and Robin Hood, and have a good name besides these."

"But thou art sorely mistaken, good Strongbow, concerning that same vaulted apartment. There is naught in it but some merchandise, which I will gladly part with to you—one hundred yards of Lincoln green, and a hundred staves of Spanish yew to make bows. These will I send thee for thy good will, worthy Strongbow, an thou wilt keep silence about the vault."

"I will," said Robin Hood; "and you may trust me. But I am grieved for your daughter. If your appeal fails with Prince John, I may yet find means to aid you in recovering her."

"And you will release me now, good Robin Hood?" exclaimed the Jew joyfully.

"I have given my word, it is enough. Some return do I owe your daughter for her kindness to me, and I am not one who ever forgets a service rendered. I hold myself security for your ransom. My life was once in your daughter's hands, and if any harm comes to her

from Sir Guy de Montferris, I vow I will reckon with him for it in such sort that he will rue the day he ever brought sorrow on a gentle damsel."

"Farewell, good Strongbow," said the Jew. "I will now set forth, and Heaven send I am successful in my pleadings with Prince John."

"Then be liberal of your offers to him, Solomon, and spare not your purse for your daughter's safety," said Robin Hood. "Credit me, that the gold you shall spare in her cause will hereafter give you as much agony as if it were poured down your throat."

CHAPTER 2.

A Challenge and a Champion.

THERE was brave feasting in the castle of York, to which Prince John had invited those nobles, prelates, and leaders by whose assistance he hoped to carry through his ambitious projects upon his brother's throne.

In this matter Sir Guy de Montferris was his right-hand man, for that baron had his own ambitious ends in view, and was at secret work among his brother nobles.

But money was needed for the carrying out of their schemes, and this was a commodity which the prince was extremely short of and the barons were shy of advancing, not being at all sure that they would ever see a return for their outlay. In these circumstances recourse had to be had to the Jews, with whom the prince and his advisers were then carrying on negotiations with regard to a heavy loan.

It was therefore the policy of Prince John to keep on friendly terms with the representatives of the tribes of Israel at that time, as Robin Hood had hinted to Solomon of Sheffield, and it was with no small amount of anger and annoyance that he heard of the abduction of Miriam by Sir Guy Montferris.

At another time the prince would have treated this deed of violence as a good jest; but now that it interfered with and impeded his own plans, he exclaimed against the perpetrator, and spoke of the broken laws in a tone which might have become King Alfred.

"The unprincipled fool!" he exclaimed. "Were I ever to become monarch of England, I would punish such transgressors with the utmost severity."

"But to become monarch of England," said Maurice Fitzurse, one of his most trusted advisers, "it is necessary that your Grace should endure the transgressions of these unprincipled fools, and afford them your protection, notwithstanding your laudable zeal for the laws which have been broken. This is especially the case with Guy de Montferris, for your Grace is well aware that we cannot stir without his aid."

Prince John struck his forehead with impatience, and then began to stride up and down the apartment.

"Are there not other women in the world, but that at such a time as this, when we wish to propitiate the Jews, he should wantonly carry off a Jewess to serve in his household?" cried the prince. "Bethink you, Fitzurse, if these children of Israel take umbrage at the act, as well they may, how shall we raise the loan? And without money we can do nothing."

"But Guy de Montferris has publicly denied the abduction," said Fitzurse.

"Of what avail is that? It may serve to blind the eyes of the populace, but the community of Jews know well enough that what this Solomon of Sheffield asserts is the truth. Montferris must give up the damsel, and after we have obtained the money he can carry off all the Jewesses in York an he so wills."

"He would scarcely desire to burden himself with some of those whom I have seen," replied Fitzurse with a grim smile. "And surely your Grace must see that to return the damsel now to her home would be the worst possible policy. That would be to admit the abduction to the world, rouse the ire of the whole Jew community, and so shatter all hopes of the loan. No, Montferris must persist in denying all knowledge of the matter, and we must adopt some measures to force some of the Jews, at all events, to believe his statement."

"How shall that be done?"

"It will be as well, perhaps, to send for Montferris," suggested Fitzurse. "He is ever fertile in plans of all sorts."

"By the mass!" cried the prince. "He is far too fertile with his plans sometimes. Send for him in Heaven's name."

Maurice Fitzurse departed with a low bow, and in a few minutes returned with Sir Guy de Montferris, a man of handsome exterior, but whose face was spoiled by the crafty, evil look that shone in the dark, flashing eyes.

He was strong, tall, and muscular, and well skilled in all knightly exercises; indeed, report stated, whether truly or not is uncertain, that he had never yet been beaten in the lists, and that the knight had yet to be found who could stand successfully against him in the tourney.

"Your Highness desires to see me," said the baron, bowing slightly to the prince.

"Ay, that do I," exclaimed John. "What folly is this I hear anent a Jewess, the daughter of Solomon of Sheffield? Have you taken leave of your senses, Montferris, that you should act thus at such a time?"

"I know not what your Highness may have heard," replied Guy Montferris coldly. "If you will explain more clearly, I shall be better able to answer your question."

"'Tis useless to pretend ignorance," said the prince. "Read this."

He handed the baron a scroll of parchment. The letter written upon it was in these words:

"To the Most Noble Prince John of England, from his most humble and obedient servant, Solomon of Sheffield.

"**Most Noble and Worthy Prince,**

"I do beseech you of your justice and clemency to afford me relief for certain wrong which has been done me by a noble of your Highness's following, one Sir Guy de Montferris. This baron has, in defiance of the law of the land and of true knightly conduct, carried off by force from my dwelling my daughter Miriam. Wherefore I pray you that you will so use your influence

that you shall compel this said Guy de Montferris to restore my daughter to me unharmed. And if in your clemency you will do this, mighty prince, your grateful servant will pay a sum in ransom into your hands to the extent of his means. I have already made appeal to Sir Guy de Montferris, but he falsely states that he knows nothing of the whereabouts of my daughter.

"Given at my house in the town of Sheffield on the thirteenth day of the month.

"Your Grace's most humble servant,
"SOLOMON,
"A Resident of Sheffield."

"What say you to that, Montferris?" demanded Prince John, as the Baron of Roystone handed back the scroll. "Give us this Jewish damsel, and the half of the ransom, which shall be a goodly sum, shall be yours."

"I will not give her up," replied Montferris defiantly. "I will own to your Highness that the damsel is secretly bestowed in my castle, but to the Jew, her father, I will make no such admission. I care nothing for his gold, for I want it not, although, truth to tell, the girl is a most obstinate wench, and will not wait at my table as I intended she should. Instead, she does nothing but reproach and revile me."

"You should be well rid of her, then," said the prince, "and accept the Jew's gold in exchange."

"She will listen to reason, perchance, in time."

"I do not counsel that she be given up," put in Fitzurse, "but yet something must be done. It is for you to make a suggestion, Montferris."

For a few minutes Guy de Montferris stood there in deep thought, then he spoke.

"I know of a plan which should serve well, and answer all our purposes," he said. "I will still deny all knowledge of Miriam, and your Highness will do well to state publicly that you believe me; but, at the same time, in order to propitiate these pestilent Jews, you can pretend to act with strict impartiality and justice. By the laws of chivalry.

this is a matter which can be decided by the ordeal of battle."

"How so?" demanded the prince. "Do you propose challenging the old Jew to meet you in single combat? Of a truth, that would be a strange ordeal indeed."

"Your Highness is pleased to jest with me," exclaimed Montferris, with some slight show of irritation. "The affair can be arranged in this manner. My knightly word having been publicly doubted by the Jewish community and others, and a slur thus cast upon my honour, I shall claim that I be judged by ordeal of battle, challenging to single combat any knight who shall choose to appear as champion for the missing Jewess, whom I shall protest is to me unknown, except by hearsay. If no champion appears, it will be held according to the laws of chivalry that I am in the right, and that there is no stain upon my honour. The same if I am the victor."

"Which you would assuredly be, Montferris, for as yet no champion who ever couched a lance has been able to oppose you successfully in the lists," said Prince John. "Your plan is a good one, and I see no reason why it should not be adopted."

"The more so," exclaimed Fitzurse, "as no champion is likely to appear on behalf of a missing Jewess."

"In future, Montferris," pursued the prince, "be good enough to choose a more fitting opportunity in which to indulge your hatred of the Jews. We have urgent need of your services now, and this is no time for dalliance."

With these words Prince John quitted the apartment, leaving the two knights together.

"Whatever possessed you to commit so mad an act?" demanded Fitzurse. "How oft have I preached to you caution in these matters? By the mass, I believe that Melchior, the Saracen, was right when he maintained that the Jewess had cast a spell over you."

"'Twere better that Melchior, the Saracen, should mind his own affairs, and not discuss mine," exclaimed Montferris angrily.

"You forget," replied Fitzurse drily,

"that it was this same Melchior who aided you in carrying her off."

"And no man could I have found better suited to the purpose," said Guy de Montferris. "But these Saracens, as a rule, are wise enough to understand the value of silence. How comes it that he discussed the matter with you?"

"Because he was aware that I was in your confidence," answered Fitzurse; "but you need have no fear, he will open his lips to no one else. It now only remains for us to make the best of the situation. Your plan is certainly the best one that could have been hit upon under the circumstances."

"Fair Miriam," said Montferris, when he was left alone, "thou art like to cost me some trouble yet. But I will not relinquish thee, even though Prince John himself demanded that I should give thee up; but that he is not like to do, for he hath fallen in with my plan."

Two days later an answer was sent to the Jew of Sheffield, in which it was pointed out that Sir Guy de Montferris still held that he knew nothing whatever of his daughter, Miriam, but that, as his knightly word had been doubted by the whole community of Jews, and as it was impossible that he could demean himself by challenging anyone of their race, even supposing they were allowed to bear arms—which they were not—he was yet willing that proof of the truth of his statement should be decided by ordeal of battle, the terms of which should be proclaimed by heralds throughout the district.

On the day after the receipt of this letter, the Jew was present when this proclamation was being made in the streets of York.

Two heralds made the proclamation in various parts of the town of York, while, on the same day, other heralds were making a similar announcement in the town of Sheffield.

The sound of their trumpets, which rang out a flourish, arrested Solomon's attention. One of the heralds, stepping forward, then proclaimed aloud:

"Oyez, oyez, ayez! By order of our most puissant Prince John of England,

these: The good knight, Sir Guy de Montferris, having had certain vile aspersions cast upon his character, in that he hath wrongfully abducted a Jewess, by name of Miriam, daughter of one Solomon, a merchant of Sheffield, doth assert that this is a foul and false statement, and is ready in proof thereof to do battle with any knight of free blood who will sustain the quarrel of this missing Jewess, and who shall dare to assert that Sir Guy de Montferris has lied; and to such champion, if one appears, Prince John allows a fair field, and equal partition of sun and wind, and whatever else appertains to a fair combat. This challenge will be again proclaimed at the hour of noon to-morrow in the presence of the most noble and valorous Prince John and his court there assembled."

The trumpets again sounded, and after a short pause the heralds made their way to another part of the town.

"Heaven have mercy on my poor child!" exclaimed the Jew, wringing his hands. "This is a device of the Evil One to compass her ruin. What champion will rise up in her defence?"

"Faith, 'tis hard to say," remarked Friar Tuck, who had been one of the crowd listening to the proclamation, and had overheard the Jew's remark, "for, seeing it is a mysteriously vanished Jewess who has to be fought about, there is reason good why no champion should appear; and yet, by mine order, it is hard that a young and beautiful creature should suffer wrong without one blow being struck in her behalf."

"Ha, good friar, it is thou!" exclaimed Solomon. "Would it not be well that I should ask the help of the valorous Robin Strongbow — Robin Hood, I mean—in this hour of my sore tribulation? He would surely help me."

"So, Jew, it is a good friar now, and valorous outlaw, sith you think we may be able to help you," said Tuck, "while the other day it was 'mad and turbulent' priest. There are many who go to Robin Hood when trouble assails them, who, on other occasions, have few good words to speak in his behalf."

"But I have his word that he will help me," pursued the Jew, "for my daughter Miriam was once the means of saving him from imminent danger."

"Say you so?" cried the friar; "then, Solomon, if you have but one tithe of the wisdom of your namesake of old, you will hasten to Robin Hood at once, for if he has pledged his word to help you, help you he will; and, indeed, were your daughter but one little bit of a Christian, my quarter-staff should ring now on the steel cap of Sir Guy de Montferris ere he carried the matter off thus."

It was, however, the general belief that no one would appear for a Jewess whose friends had accused a brave knight of having carried her off, without being able to prove their accusation.

For Sir Guy de Montferris, although generally feared and hated on account of his fierce and overbearing disposition, was well known to have borne himself bravely in battle.

This latter fact made it all the more strange that he should have descended to speaking a falsehood.

On ordinary occasions he would, no doubt, have owned to the abduction and treated the clamour of the Jew community with contempt; but to do so now would have been to incur the displeasure of Prince John, and he had reasons of policy for not doing that at present. Hence he had demeaned himself by telling a lie, but was ready to do battle to uphold that the lie was truth.

At noon on the following day a great crowd assembled in the field of Ardale, just outside the South Gate of York, to hear the final proclamation of the heralds.

Prince John and his suite were there in a Royal pavilion, pitched at one side of the field, and the assemblage was graced, too, by the presence of many fair ladies, for the unusual nature of the challenge had excited widespread interest.

Sir Guy de Montferris stood alone at one end of the field, his esquire behind him leading his horse up and down and carrying his lance.

The heralds made the proclamation in much the same words as they had used on the previous day in the town, but neither at the first nor the second time did any champion appear for the Jewess.

Solomon of Sheffield had, by Prince John's command, been accommodated with a seat near the Royal pavilion, but somewhat apart from those occupied by the courtiers, for the wily prince was anxious to make a great show of justice, which those who were best acquainted with him knew was mere pretence to serve the purpose of the moment.

"By the rood, Jew!" called out the prince, after the announcement had been made for the second time by the heralds, "an thou art not prepared with a champion to do battle on thy daughter's behalf, it must be held that the good knight, Sir Guy de Montferris, hath spoken truthfully when he says that he knoweth nothing of her, as I well believe. 'Tis far more likely that your Miriam has of her own free will gone off with some young man of your own race."

Solomon of Sheffield made a gesture of dissent.

"It is not so, your Highness," he protested. "My beauteous Miriam has, I know, been carried off by yonder cowardly knight, for, brave though he may be in battle, I, nevertheless, hold that to carry away a maiden by violence is cowardly. I maintain the truth of my assertion, and I challenge such delay as your forms will permit to see if God, whose opportunity is in man's extremity, will raise up a deliverer; and when such uttermost space is passed, I will yield me to your judgment."

Prince John darted a curious and troubled glance at the Jew, and a suspicion flashed through his mind that the latter had some reason for speaking with such unusual boldness.

"The saints forbid," he said, "that Jew or pagan should impeach us of injustice. The heralds shall make proclamation for the last time when the shadow of yonder tree touches the edge of our Royal pavilion. If by that time

no champion appears in answer to the challenge, Sir Guy de Montferris shall be held to have truth and right on his side."

The Jew bowed his head submissively, and then there followed a dead pause of many minutes. Solomon could not keep his eyes from the shadow which was moving slowly and almost imperceptibly over the grass. Yet to his excited imagination it seemed to be travelling all too quickly.

At length the end of the shadow touched the lower edge of the pavilion. Prince John gave the signal, and the heralds' trumpets blared forth for the third time.

At length, as the last words of the challenge were proclaimed, and the music of the heralds' trumpets ended in a long, high flourish, they were answered by a solitary bugle, which breathed a note of defiance from the southern end of the field.

All eyes were turned to see the champion who had thus so unexpectedly appeared, and a moment later he emerged from a grove of trees and rode into the lists.

A hundred voices exclaimed: "A champion! A champion!"

The adventurer was of muscular and athletic build, giving the impression also of great activity; but, contrary to usual custom, he was not clad in complete armour, but wore only back and breast plate over an undersuit of Lincoln green.

The device on his shield was a scarlet arrow in full flight. There was nothing else, and no motto beneath, as was often the case, but the device stood out so clearly that it attracted marked attention at once.

He was mounted on a gallant black horse, and, as he reined up in front of the Royal pavilion, he gracefully saluted the prince and the ladies by lowering his lance.

The dexterity with which he managed his steed won him the favour of the multitude, although they had no idea who he was, for he wore his visor down to conceal his features.

To the summons of the herald who demanded his rank, his name, and pur-

pose, the stranger knight answered readily and boldly.

"I am a good knight and noble, come hither to sustain with lance and sword the just and lawful quarrel of Miriam, daughter of Solomon of Sheffield, who I maintain is held in durance against her free will by Sir Guy de Montferris, in his castle of Roystone. And I further maintain that the statement made by Sir Guy de Mortferris is false and truthless, and I defy him as a traitor, an abductor, and a liar, as I will prove in this field with my body against his, by the aid of God, of Our Lady, and Saint George."

"The stranger must first show," said the prince, "that he is a good knight, and of honourable lineage. The device upon his shield is strange to us."

"I have given my name and lineage to the marshal of the lists, your Grace," replied the Knight of the Scarlet Arrow, "and according to the laws of chivalry I am bound by a vow not to disclose either name or rank for a certain period, except to the marshal or heralds of the lists, who are also bound to keep my secret."

Prince John had to express himself satisfied with this reply—although in good sooth it angered and alarmed him, for amidst the frequent and capricious vows by which knights were accustomed to bind themselves in the days of chivalry, there were none more common than those by which they engaged to hide their name for a certain space, or until some particular adventure was achieved.

"It is well," said Prince John haughtily, "we accept you, Sir Knight of the Arrow—since that is the only title by which we can address you—as the champion of this mysteriously vanished Jewess, and we appoint that the combat shall take place two days hence, at high noon, in these lists of Ardale."

So saying, he prepared to leave the lists with his glittering train, and his mounting his steed for that purpose was the signal for the spectators to disperse, which they did in little parties, all eagerly discussing the probable outcome of the forthcoming combat.

CHAPTER 3.

Victory for Robin Hood.

WE must now change the scene to the town of Sheffield, or rather to a large house on the outskirts of the town, which was the residence of the wealthy Israelite, Solomon.

In an apartment, small indeed, but richly furnished with decorations of an Oriental taste, Solomon was seated on a sort of divan, or low platform that surrounded the chamber, and which served instead of chairs and stools.

The evening was becoming dark when a servant entered the apartment and placed upon the table two silver lamps, fed with perfumed oil; the richest wines and the most delicate refreshments were at the same time displayed by another domestic on a small ebony table, inlaid with silver, for in the interior of their houses the Jews denied themselves no expensive indulgences.

But Solomon neither partook of the food nor the wines, being too perturbed in spirit to care either for eating or drinking.

The second servant who entered informed him that a Nazarene—so they termed Christians, while conversing among themselves—desired to speak with him.

Solomon immediately commanded the stranger to be admitted, and a few moments later the door opened and Robin Hood entered.

"Ah! good Robin Strongbow," exclaimed Solomon joyfully, "right gallantly did you bear yourself in the lists to-day. Truly the horse and breastplate which I procured for you from Balthasar of Lombardy, who dwells in the city of York, were fitted for a prince. You will do battle on behalf of my daughter against this fierce Baron of Roystone, yet it may happen that you will not be victorious in the encounter."

"That may certainly happen," admitted Robin Hood, smiling. "In which case the arms and steed of the knight who is unhorsed are forfeit to his victor. Now I may be unfortunate, and so lose what I cannot replace or repay."

The Jew looked somewhat astounded at this possibility, but replied hastily:

"No—no—it is impossible—I will not think so. The blessing of our Father Abraham will be upon thee. Thy lance will be powerful as the rod of Moses."

"The steed may be slain, the armour injured," said Robin Hood, "for I will spare neither horse nor man."

The Jew twisted himself on his seat like a man in a fit of the colic; but his better feelings predominated over his selfish ones.

"I care not," he said, "I care not! It is for my child's sake that the risk is run. And yet"—he paused and gazed with a troubled look at his guest—"it may be that if that proud and fierce knight, Sir Guy de Montferris, is vanquished, he will still refuse to deliver up my daughter. What then, good Robin Strongbow?"

"Then," replied the outlaw chief, "I will take other measures against this recreant knight, for I have a score of my own to settle with him. But we need not discuss the possible issue of the conflict now. I have come to warn you, Solomon, that you must not fail to be present in the lists, and that if I am victor you must claim that your daughter be returned to you before sunset of that day. Sir Guy de Montferris has chosen the ordeal by single combat, thinking that no opponent can stand against him, so he must abide by that ordeal whatever befall."

"He is a fierce and savage warrior," pursued the Jew timorously, "and as I have heard, unbeaten in the tourney. And thou, good Robin Strongbow, although the best of archers and the bravest of men, hast, perhaps, not had the practice in these knightly exercises that—"

"Fearest thou still, Jew?" exclaimed Robin Hood, with a touch of haughty contempt in his voice. "Well, perhaps there is excuse for thee. To ease thy mind I will confide a secret to thine ears, but see that thou dost not repeat it to a living soul. I am known to most as Robin Hood, the outlaw, but I am by right of birth, the Earl of Huntingdon. My father was foully murdered, and the estates were seized by that vile

tyrant Prince John. Therefore live I for vengeance."

Dark and stern were Robin Hood's features as he spoke, and the Jew did not venture to interrupt the bitter thoughts and memories that had so changed the gallant outlaw's expression and bearing in a moment.

Presently, however, the features of Sherwood's king brightened and he spoke again.

"You understand, good Jew," he said, "that not only have I skill in arms, but have the right to bear them in encounter with any knight in Christendom. Forget not to be present at the tourney. Farewell!"

Ere the Jew could answer him he was gone.

* * * * *

The morning of the combat on which hung not only the fate of the two knights engaged, but also of Miriam, broke fair and cloudless, and long before the hour of noon crowds of spectators in holiday attire made their way towards the lists.

The lists extended in length from east to west, so as to give both parties absolutely equal advantages of the midday sun.

Prince John's royal seat was erected on the southern side of the enclosure, just in the centre, where the combatants were expected to meet in mid-encounter. Galleries, or stands, had also been erected for the ladies and nobles, while the crowd of ordinary people had spaces allotted to them.

At either extremity of the lists was a barrier, which could be opened or shut at pleasure.

As soon as Prince John had taken his seat the sponsors, or seconds, of both champions went, as was their duty, to see that they were duly armed and prepared for combat.

Sir Eustace Alleyne performed this office for Robin Hood—known to the spectators only as the Knight of the Scarlet Arrow—while Maurice Fitzurse performed a like duty for Sir Guy de Montferris.

"Who is this Knight of the Scarlet Arrow, who is thy opponent, and the champion of the Jewess?" asked Fitz-

urse of Montferris, as he watched the squires arming him.

"I know not," replied Montferris, "and I care but little. I fear not the result of the encounter with an unknown knight."

"Boast not, Montferris," counselled Fitzurse gloomily, "for I tell you I am smitten with grave misgivings. Would that I knew who he is."

"Perchance you may recognise him when you see him more closely," returned Montferris, carelessly, "for this day he has looked his last upon the sun."

"That may, or may not, be," said Fitzurse. "But I hope that you have a good horse and a good lance, for you will surely need both."

"Have no fear on that score," answered Montferris. "I leave nothing to chance."

The hour of noon at length arrived, the trumpets sounded, the knights rode into the lists armed at all points, and mounted like men who were to do battle for a kingdom's honour.

A temporary altar was erected not far from the Royal pavilion, and beside it stood a churchman in the dress of a Carmelite friar.

To this altar the challenger and defender were successively brought forward, conducted by their respective sponsors.

Dismounting before it, each knight avouched the justice of his cause by a solemn oath, and prayed that his success might be according to the truth or the falsehood of that which he then swore.

They also made oath that they came to do battle in knightly guise, and with the usual weapons, disclaiming the use of spells, charms, or magical devices, to incline victory to their side.

The Knight of the Scarlet Arrow pronounced his vow with a firm and manly voice, and when the ceremony was finished, loaded with armour as he was, sprang to the saddle without the use of the stirrup, and rode away to his station at the eastern extremity of the lists.

Sir Guy de Montferris also presented himself before the altar with boldness

enough, but his voice as he took the oath sounded hollow, as if drowned in his helmet.

The lips with which he appealed to Heaven to adjudge victory to the just quarrel, trembled as they uttered the impious mockery.

As he turned to remount his horse, Fitzurse approached him closer, as if to rectify something about the fitting of his gorget, and whispered:

"For Heaven's sake, Montferris, fear not the ordeal now."

"Fear it!" returned the other hoarsely. "I fear no living man; but we might, I think, have dispensed with this mummery."

"That is impossible," said Fitzurse. "The rules of these contests must be obeyed."

However, Montferris quickly recovered himself, sprang to the saddle with his usual agility, and displayed his address in horsemanship as he assumed his position opposite to his foeman.

Each shook his lance aloft, as if to ascertain the weight and toughness of the unwieldy weapon, and then laid it in the rest.

The sponsors, heralds, and squires now retired to the barriers, and the combatants sat opposite to each other, face to face, so absolutely motionless that they looked more like statues than beings of flesh and blood.

The silence of suspense was now general. Scarce a sound was to be heard save the snorting and pawing of the good steeds, which, sensible of what was about to happen, were impatient to dash into career.

They stood thus for perhaps three minutes, when, at a signal given by the marshal, the heralds sounded a flourish on their trumpets, and each champion striking his horse with the spurs set it at a gallop.

The knights met in mid-space with a shock like a thunderbolt.

The lances burst into shivers up to the very grasp, and it seemed at the moment that both knights had fallen, for the shock had made each horse recoil backwards upon its haunches.

The riders, however, saved their steeds by use of the bridle and spur,

and having glared on each other for an instant with eyes which seemed to flash fire, each retired to the extremity of the lists to receive a fresh lance from the attendants.

A loud shout went up from the spectators, accompanied by the waving of scarfs and handkerchiefs.

A few minutes' pause having been allowed so that the combatants and their horses might recover breath, Prince John signed to the heralds to sound the onset.

The champions a second time sprang from their stations, and closed in the centre of the lists with the same speed and the same violence, but not the same equal fortune as before. In this second encounter the Knight of the Scarlet Arrow aimed at the centre of his antagonist's shield, and struck it so fairly and forcibly that the spear went to shivers, and Sir Guy de Montferris reeled in his saddle.

On the other hand that champion had, in the beginning of his career, directed the point of his lance towards his opponent's shield, but at the contact the sharp point was diverted against the horse, wounding the noble animal mortally.

With the quickness of lightning Robin Hood disengaged himself from his fallen steed, and drew his sword just as the girths of his opponent's saddle burst, and horse and man rolled on the ground in a cloud of dust.

To extricate himself from his stirrups was to the Norman knight scarce the work of a moment, and stung with madness, both at his disgrace and at the acclamations with which it was hailed by the spectators, he also drew his sword, and the combat was continued on foot.

But the Knight of the Arrow was a master in the use of this weapon, and after a few passes he struck Sir Guy de Montferris to the earth with a tremendous blow which fell full on the crest of the helmet.

Robin Hood, placing his foot on his opponent's breast, and the sword's point at his throat, commanded Montferris to yield, or die on the spot.

But Prince John saved his favourite

from further mortification, by giving a sign for the fighting to cease.

"We shall meet again, I trust," said the Norman baron, as he rose to his feet and cast a resentful glance at his antagonist, "and where there are none to separate us."

"If we do not," said the Knight of the Arrow, "the fault will not be mine. On foot or horseback, with spear, with axe, or with sword, I am alike ready to encounter you."

The marshals now interposed between the two knights, and Montferris returned to his tent, crestfallen, furious, and in an agony of despair.

The Knight of the Arrow presented himself before the pavilion of Prince John.

"I have proved by the ordeal of battle, which Sir Guy de Montferris chose himself, that he is a false and purjured knight," he said. "It now remains for him to admit that Heaven has decided justly between us, and that it was he who carried off the Jewish maiden."

"We adjudge thee victor," replied Prince John coldly. "And we will ourselves inquire further into this matter, and cause search to be made for the missing maiden."

"No search is necessary," said Robin Hood. "It needs only that you shall order that the damsel be given up. Good Jew, state now your demand, for seeing that I am the victor, you have the right."

Thus adjured, Solomon bent low before the prince, whose brow was by this time black with rage and mortification.

"Noble and just prince," said the Jew, "it is my desire that my daughter Miriam be restored to me before sunset this day."

"All shall be done in this matter that is possible," replied the prince shortly; "but we know no more than you do where your daughter is to be found. If Sir Guy still asserts that he knows nothing of her, we will cause diligent search to be made throughout the district. More we cannot do."

"Appeal no further, Solomon," cried Robin Hood, with a haughty and dis-

dainful glance towards the prince. "It would seem that the result of this ordeal, having gone unexpectedly against the Norman baron, is now to be set at naught. Let Sir Guy de Montferris look to it, for though I burn his castle about his ears, I swear I will rescue your daughter from his clutches."

With that the daring outlaw, mounting the horse of his vanquished adversary—which by the rules of the tourney was now his property—rode slowly from the lists.

Prince John gazed after him, pale to the lips with anger, yet not daring to interfere with him.

"Fitzurse," he said, calling that noble to his side, "find means to discover who the Knight of the Arrow really is. He has been openly defiant, and we must tame him. You understand?"

"Your Grace's commands shall be obeyed," replied Fitzurse.

CHAPTER 4

Sad News of Friar Tuck.

"By Saint Dunstan, worthy captain," exclaimed Friar Tuck, the morning after the combat in the lists of Ardale, "'tis pity thou didst not cleave the skull of that dastard Norman knight when thou hadst him at the mercy of thy sword. The world were well rid of such as he."

"Prince John, unfair as ever, was too quick in throwing down his truncheon, and thus saving the life of his favourite noble," replied Robin Hood. "Noble, forsooth! the title is a misnomer. There is not an atom of nobility about Sir Guy de Montferris. He is dis- honoured and perjured, and a disgrace to knighthood."

"For all which Prince John cares little," said the friar, "so he serves his purpose. There are far more honest men among the outlaws of Sherwood than among the followers of King Richard's brother."

"There is truth in what you say, jovial priest," exclaimed Will Scarlet; "but in the meantime, Robin Hood, how are you going to act in this matter,

for I dare be sworn it has not ended on the field of Ardale?"

"That it has not, Will," replied Robin Hood. "The fair Miriam once did me a service, and I am determined that I will rescue her from the clutches of Montferris. But it will behove us to act warily in this matter, for the Baron of Roystone will now be upon his guard."

"But he will never know that the Knight of the Scarlet Arrow and Robin Hood, King of Sherwood Forest, are one and the same person," exclaimed Will Scarlet.

"The day may come when he shall know it," said the outlaw chief. "Perchance it will happen when next we meet face to face in mortal combat, as we surely shall. But we must remember that he is on his guard now. Our first act must be to try to find out whether the Jewess is still in his castle, for that she was carried there in the first instance I know well."

"Let that task be mine!" cried Friar Tuck. "A holy friar is viewed always with less suspicion than a forester in Lincoln green."

"It depends upon the friar," retorted Little John. "By my faith, an you let them know who you are, they will put so little trust in you that a cell in the dungeons and bread and water for diet will be your portion. A long fast and penance will there be for the holy clerk of Copmanshurst."

There was a laugh at the huge forester's retort, and Friar Tuck glanced angrily at him.

"Have a care for thy pate, thou bullock!" he cried, "for thick though thy head may be, it is not so thick but what I may crack it with my quarter-staff."

"Enough, enough," interposed Robin Hood. "There will be heads enough of your foes to be cracked anon, without engaging in any quarrel among yourselves. You say you are willing to reconnoitre this castle of Roystone, good priest?"

"Ay, that I am, either inside or out."

"I doubt whether you will get a sight of the inside," pursued Robin Hood; "but you may obtain some information

worth having by making inquiries among the servitors and retainers; they are always ready enough to gossip with a priest who may happen to be travelling from one town to another. And if you can but give them news from York or Nottingham—”

“News shall they have that will cause them to open their eyes wide with astonishment,” cried the burly friar, laughing. “And now methinks that a roast capon would not be amiss to strengthen me for the ordeal which I have to pass through. For who knows, it may be many hours ere another bite or sup passes my lips; and by the blessed Saint Hubert 'twould be a sin to start on a journey with an empty stomach.”

“You would take good care not to do that,” said Little John. “Never yet have I known of your starting on a journey, even a short one, with an empty stomach.”

If that was so, the friar in this instance sustained his reputation, for not only did a roast capon disappear down his capacious throat, but also a large portion of a goodly pasty and the best part of a loaf of rye bread.

This solid meal was washed down by a draught of mead, after which the friar arose as a giant refreshed.

“Now I will hie me to the castle of Roystone,” he said, seizing his quarter-staff, and secreting a good, keen-bladed hunting-knife in his girdle, “and it will go hard but that I return with some information well worth listening to,”

So saying, he strode away humming a merry ballad to himself, and was soon lost to sight in the depths of the forest.

The castle of Roystone was situated about seven miles from the outlaws' encampment, but as there was a river to be crossed, and no beaten track through the forest, except by going a long way round, the afternoon was far advanced ere the jovial priest came in sight of the castle.

Ever considering that boldness was the best policy, he crossed the drawbridge without hesitation, and hammered lustily at the outer gate. After a short pause it was opened by a warder.

“By the way in which you thunder at the portal,” exclaimed the fellow, in surly tones, “it is evident that you have not been living on priestly fare of late. Had there been any fast days with you, curtail frair, your muscles had not been so brawny.”

“Sir Warder,” answered the priest, “your thoughts, like those of the ignorant laity, are according to the flesh. It has pleased my patron saint to bless the pittance to which I restrain myself, so that outwardly it would appear that I defiled myself with meats and strong ale as doubtless you do.”

“Holy friar,” said the warder “upon whose person it hath pleased Heaven to work such a miracle, for what purpose have you come to this castle?”

“Rest and refreshment, no more,” was the reply.

“Refreshment thou shalt have without a doubt; far be it from me to turn a holy priest away fasting,” said the warder. “But as thou hast already said that thou wouldst not defile thy body with meat and strong drink, why, a hermit's meal of peas and cold water shall be placed before you.”

The warder was as good as his word, and it was a sight that would have done the heart of the yeomen good, could they have but seen the burly friar at this frugal repast.

Taking some three or four dried peas between his fingers, he modestly put them into a very large mouth, furnished with teeth which might have ranked with those of a boar both in sharpness and whiteness; a miserable grist, as it seemed, for so large and able a mill.

After Tuck had with great difficulty accomplished the mastication of a couple of mouthfuls of the dried peas, he raised the can of water to his lips and took a moderate draught.

Then he uttered a sigh, which might have been a sigh of content, but was more likely evoked by the sight of the warder and his companions, who were feasting themselves with huge slices cut from a goodly joint of roast beef.

“And now, worthy father,” pursued the warder, “having finished your meal, you are doubtless anxious to obtain some rest.”

To this proposition the friar assented, for his design was to obtain a glimpse of the interior of the castle, and if possible get into conversation with some of the domestics.

"A pallet of straw is all I ask," he said, "for I must be up and away to continue my journey ere sunrise tomorrow morning."

"Here is something better than a pallet of straw," replied the warder, throwing open the gate and pointing towards some thinly scattered trees at the foot of the castle hill.

"Dried leaves are there in plenty," he went on, "and a sloping bank of soft grass whereon they may be spread. 'Tis a bed fit for a prince, for as there has been no rain of late the ground is quite dry. And there is this vantage, that you will be able to pursue your journey in the morning without troubling to rouse up any of the servitors to open the doors for you."

"Do you mean then that you refuse me shelter?" demanded the priest.

"We mean that we want no meddling priests within the walls of this castle," replied the warder. "We have given you food and drink, such as you say is your ordinary fare; be thankful therefore and depart."

And without more ado a couple of the guard pushed the friar outside and banged the gate to after him.

It may well be supposed that this treatment aroused the worthy priest's ire, nor was his anger in any way diminished at hearing the roar of laughter within the guard-room at his discomfiture.

"Norman churls!" he muttered, "trust me but I will get even with you for this."

As he was thus baffled in getting to the interior of the castle, he made the best of the situation and reconnoitred every part of it from the outside. He soon found, however, that nothing much was to be gained by this, particularly as it was getting dusk, and he was about to turn away disappointed, when from a window of an upper chamber in the turret he saw something white fluttering, like a lady's scarf. He paused and gazed earnestly

at the narrow aperture, from which there was presently thrust forth a hand and arm, by their whiteness and slimness the hand and arm of a woman, to a certainty.

"'Tis the Jewess," he muttered; "of that I will wager my quarter-staff against a king's ransom. Perchance it is fortunate that I did not gain admittance to the castle, for I should not have been allowed near the turret chambers, and should therefore never have caught sight of her. Ah! what is that?"

Something white fluttered from the hand, and there being a strong wind blowing it was presently carried right over the outer walls almost to Friar Tuck's feet.

On picking it up, he found that it was a small square of linen on which some words had been traced with some black substance.

"For the love of Heaven," ran the message, "help me to escape from the power of this vile Baron of Roystone, and convey to my father, Solomon, the merchant of Sheffield, the news of his daughter's whereabouts. Surely there is some brave man who will succour me."

The strangely written message was unsigned, but Friar Tuck knew, of course, it came from Miriam, the Jewess, who had been well educated by her father. Her reference to Solomon was sufficient proof of that.

Friar Tuck waved the strip of linen in token that he had read the words written thereon; there was an answering wave of the hand from the imprisoned maiden, and then the friar turned and quitted the precincts of the castle.

"'Tis foul shame that so beauteous a damsel should be held prisoner by that false Norman," he muttered as he strode onward, "and were she twenty times a Jewess I would do my best to assist in her rescue."

Night fell and still found the priest in the deep and gloomy recesses of the forest. The sky was black and overcast, and the hollow moaning of the wind betokened a coming storm.

A few spots of rain pattered heavily upon the dried leaves, and in the distance could be heard the faint rumble of thunder.

"Beshrew me!" exclaimed the friar; "but it would seem that I am like to have a wetting to-night. And a good five miles yet from the encampment, with no shelter between here and there. Ha! what rock is that? Surely I cannot have missed my way in the darkness, like to some town-bred man. And yet I do not remember having seen this rock before."

Ahead of him, about two hundred yards away, rose a great rock. It was perhaps thirty feet high, while nearly at the summit he could see what seemed like masonry. A doorway was fashioned, just as though someone had used the place as a refuge.

"It will be worth exploring," thought Friar Tuck; "yet, by Saint Dunstan, 'tis strange that I should have missed my way, even in the pitch darkness. Had I partaken too freely of sack or strong ale I could have understood it; but a man's brain does not become bewildered on parched peas and cold water."

Arrived at the rock he looked around him. There was no sign of human being near at hand, and all was silent as death, save for the sound of the moaning wind.

He gazed up towards the masonry at the summit of the rock, which looked like a chapel, and eagerly sought for some sign of life.

"In times gone by a hermit may have—"

He paused abruptly. A queer grating sound seemed to come from the heart of the rock, and a minute later he saw a light appear at a small window, which had been hidden from him up to then by the thick bushes.

A face next showed at the aperture, the face of a dark-skinned, bearded man, with glittering black eyes. The friar crossed himself.

"'Tis a follower of Mahoud!" he muttered; "an infidel, a pagan, living here on the borders of Sherwood Forest."

A minute later the man himself appeared. He was a Saracen without a

doubt, the colour of his skin and the rich Eastern garb which he wore betokened that. A jewel glittered in the front of his turban.

"Welcōme, holy priest, to the hermit's cell," he said. "A storm is coming on; you will surely take shelter beneath my roof."

"A hermit! Thou!" exclaimed the friar in surprise.

"We have hermits and holy men in the East," was the reply, "as well as you in the West. I am known as Melchior, the Saracen."

"And I," replied Friar Tuck, "as the Holy Clerk of Copmanshurst."

Melchior, the Saracen, inclined his head in acknowledgment of the priest's statement, and the motion did equally well to hide the triumphant and evil smile that curled his thin lips for a moment.

The thunder was crashing more frequently and much louder now, while flashes of lightning occasionally lit up the dark aisles of the forest. The rain fell more heavily.

"Come!" repeated the Saracen. "Will you take shelter from the storm beneath my roof?"

"I will accept thine offer," replied Friar Tuck, "though I doubt the sin of sharing the hospitality of a follower of Mahoud and Termagaunt will cost me many paternosters, and the voweding of many candles for the altar of my patron saint."

"Your king, Richard Cœur de Lion, did not disdain to accept the hospitality of my countrymen on more than one occasion when out in Palestine," answered Melchior.

"Since he had slain so many," retorted Friar Tuck, "he might with a clear conscience accept occasional hospitality from others in times of truce."

"Enough," said Melchior. "This is but a vain discussion. Follow me!"

With considerable agility, he climbed up the steep sides of his resting-place, followed at a more leisurely pace by the burly priest, until he came to a doorway seemingly hewn out of the rock.

"Enter!" he said. "There is shelter from the storm at least, even though there be no great amount of comfort."

The apartment in which Friar Tuck found himself was partly hewn out of the solid rock, and partly built with rough blocks of stone strongly cemented together.

The way in which it was built gave it roughly the form of a chapel when viewed from a distance, but within it was simply a four-sided stone apartment, with an arched roof, strengthened by thick oak rafters.

In one corner there was an Eastern divan, covered with soft cushions, a low table occupied the centre of the room, and a tripod, on which was set a brass cauldron filled with glowing coals, was standing near the table.

The room was illuminated by a curiously-carved lamp which hung from the ceiling by a chain of copper.

"I cannot offer you food," said Melchior, as the friar, with a muttered "Benedicite," seated himself on the divan, "for that which I prepare for myself would not suit the palate of you Western Giaours. But wine have I here of the best vintage, which, though I may not taste it myself, it being against the rules of my religion, I yet keep for my guests."

"Bring it forth, gentle pagan," exclaimed the friar, feeling that it would be churlish to refuse such hospitality.

Crossing the room, Melchior produced from a recess an earthen jar, stamped curiously with all manner of quaint devices, and from this he filled a cup with rich red wine.

"Drink that," he said. "I have been told that it is unequalled, even by the best vintages of Europe.

"Methinks that you will have to remain as my guest until the morning," pursued Melchior, as he watched the friar sipping at the wine, "and for that reason I regret that I have no suitable food to place before you. Still I may, at least, enable you to pass an hour agreeably ere you retire to rest, by imparting to you some of the knowledge of the East—"

"Heaven forfend!" exclaimed the priest, crossing himself. "I'll none of it!"

"As you will," said Melchior, shrugging his shoulders. "But you may at

least see no harm in gazing on the face—the pictured face—of one in whom you are at present greatly interested."

"How shall that be possible?" asked the friar.

"You shall see."

From the breast of his long, flowing garment Melchior took a small packet containing a white powder. Stretching his hand over the glowing coals in the brazier, he let the powder fall like a shower of silver on the fire.

A thin, greyish smoke rose up towards the roof, then spread out until the whole room seemed to be filled with a dim vapour, almost blotting out the light of the lamp.

Again he threw some powder on the embers. Again a flame shot up, died down, and gave place to the grey, spreading smoke.

"Behold!"

With staring, startled eyes Friar Tuck gazed into the grey cloud. A face seemed to be forming amid the vapour, with features indistinct at first but gradually assuming definite shape, until at last the face of a beautiful girl was plainly visible.

"Miriam, the Jewess!" gasped the friar.

He turned towards the Saracen. The eyes of the dark-visaged stranger seemed to be glowing with an evil, mocking light.

"Said I not so?" exclaimed Melchior. "One in whom you are greatly interested—"

The friar sprang to his feet, and snatched up his quarter-staff.

"Accursed necromancer and worker of magic!" he cried. "You shall practise your black arts no more!"

He swung his quarter-staff round, but the blow never descended.

A mocking laugh rang through the room; a deafening crash of thunder just overhead at the same instant shook the building to its foundation; a darkness came before the friar's eyes, and a moment later he fell to the ground insensible.

* * * *

It was on the evening following the strange event which had taken place in the cell in the wood occupied by Mel-

chior, the Saracen, that a messenger arrived in hot haste at the outlaws' camp, and asked to see the chief at once.

Little John, who was on guard, immediately led him to Robin Hood.

"'Tis a messenger from Leofric the Saxon," he said, "who seems to have tidings of some importance to communicate."

"Well, good fellow," said Robin Hood, "what tidings do you bring?"

"'Tis about the jovial priest, Friar Tuck," replied the messenger. "Now, alas! a jovial priest no more."

"What mean you? What about him? Has anything happened—?"

"The worst that can possibly happen," said the messenger. "He is dead!"

"Dead, say you!" cried Robin Hood and Little John in a breath.

"Even so, good masters. I saw him being carried on a bier to the Abbey of Roystone with my own eyes."

"The Abbey of Roystone!" exclaimed Robin Hood. "Then he has met his death at the hands of that dishonoured miscreant, the baron, or some of his retainers."

"It must be so," agreed Little John sadly, "for the Abbot of Roystone and his fat monks are all creatures in the pay of Sir Guy de Montferris. 'Tis a wonder they have taken the trouble even to give him decent burial. Poor old comrade! Many a tough knock have I received at his hands during our bouts with cudgel or quarter-staff, but gladly would I take them all over again without returning a single blow, an it would but help to restore him to life again."

"No man will be more sorely missed than the jovial priest," said Robin Hood; "and if I find that he has come to his death by foul play, I will surely avenge him. Let us hear the particulars, good fellow."

"I cannot tell you how he came by his death," replied the messenger, "though 'tis said his body was found in the forest by one of the retainers of the Baron of Roystone. Be that as it may, as my companion, Edgar the archer, and myself were passing on our

homeward way, we came upon the procession, two retainers from the castle carrying the bier, and two monks following, chanting a service. They paused for a moment to rest, and out of curiosity we stepped forward to gaze upon the face of the dead man. It was the good friar whom—"

"You are certain that you have made no mistake?" interposed Robin Hood.

"Would that I could think a mistake possible," said the messenger; "but both Edgar and I knew the jovial priest right well, for many a time and oft has he supped with us. We told all this to our master, Leofric, and he bade me carry the news to you with speed. Moreover, he said that as you would without doubt wish to attend the funeral of the good friar, which would be impossible if he is interred by the monks of Roystone Abbey, he would send and demand the body from them; but that first he would be pleased if you, and such of your band as you might like to accompany you, would come up to his dwelling and discuss the matter with him."

"Your master was ever a good friend of ours," replied Robin Hood. "Carry back to him my greetings and thanks, and say that we will gladly accept his offer, and will attend at his hall at sunset to-morrow."

Then, having given the messenger a piece of money, and ordered that he should be provided with food and drink, he dismissed him.

Little did Robin Hood and his followers dream what great events were foreshadowed by the dismal news they had just heard.

CHAPTER 5.

A Ghost Walks and Talks.

As the sun, all fiery red, was just dipping below the tops of the trees Robin Hood, Little John, and Will Scarlet presented themselves at the entrance of the residence of Leofric the Saxon.

It was a low building, flanked at the extremity of the right wing by a massive tower of very ancient build.

A flight of steps, so deep and narrow

as to be almost precipitous, led up to a low portal in the south side of the tower, whence access to the upper apartments was given by stairs, which were carried up through the external buttresses.

By this difficult and complicated entrance, the three gallant outlaws were ushered into the round apartment, which occupied the whole of the third storey from the ground.

In this chamber Leofric the Saxon was seated at the head of a large oaken table, attended only by Anwold, the steward of the establishment.

The worthy thane greeted the foresters with great cordiality, and bade them be seated, at the same time informing them that refreshments would be shortly placed before them.

"It is but mournful tidings I had to send you, good Robin Hood," said Leofric, "and none can be more grieved than I at the untimely end of the jovial friar, for I liked him right well. I fear there has been foul work done, for 'tis passing strange that his body should have been found in the forest. What think you should he have been doing in the neighbourhood of Roystone Castle?"

Robin Hood explained that the priest had gone to the castle in order to find out whether Miriam, the Jewess, was imprisoned there.

"I fear me that they must have discovered his errand and slain him," concluded the captain of outlaws, "and afterwards carried his body to the forest where they pretended to discover it."

Leofric the Saxon shook his head.

"Sir Guy de Montferris would not go to that trouble," he said, "for he could always find excuse for taking the life of anyone found on his domain without having his permission to be there."

"There must then be some deep reason underlying this bold show given to the event," rejoined Robin Hood.

"It may be that the Norman tyrant intends by that means to convey a warning that it will be well for no one to attempt to pry into the secrets hidden within the walls of Roystone. He would be well aware that it would be

understood by those whom it most concerned."

"It may be that you are right, noble Leofric," said Robin Hood. "But the whole affair savours too much of mystery to please me."

Their conversation was here interrupted by the appearance of four servants, who bore the evening repast on covered dishes.

The foresters, however, had little inclination for the meal, although, in acknowledgment of the courtesy and hospitality of their noble host, they took their places at the table.

The conversation was resumed while the repast proceeded.

"I shall send to-morrow," proceeded Leofric, "and demand the body of the worthy friar from the Abbot of Roystone, and it will go ill with him an he refuses to give it up, hireling of De Montferris's though he be."

"For myself," said Robin Hood, "I shall not rest until I have discovered the cause of the priest's death, and who were the perpetrators of the deed, for it is more likely that he has been foully murdered than that he fell in fair combat."

"And his death must be avenged," exclaimed Little John vehemently; "for, an we omitted to do so, the ghost of the friar himself would burst his cerements and stand before us—By the bones of Saint Hubert, what is this dread apparition?"

It seemed as if the words of Little John had raised a spectre, for there was a horrible noise and shouting below-stairs, and at the same moment the door flew open, and Friar Tuck, arrayed in the garments of the grave, stood before them like someone arisen from the dead.

The effect of this apparition on the persons present was utterly appalling at first. But it quickly passed when they noted the expression on the face of the "spectre."

Little John, indeed, emitted a low chuckle and, striking a theatrical attitude, spoke in mock terror to the portly friar.

"In the name of all the saints!" said he, "if thou art mortal, speak! If a

departed spirit, say for what cause thou dost revisit us. Is it to name thy murderers? Living or dead, good Friar Tuck, speak to your old comrade."

"I will," replied the spectre, "when I have collected breath, and when you give me time. Alive, saidst thou? I am as much alive as he can be who has had but one crust of bread to eat the last two days. The half of a loaf, that is all, I do assure thee, if I except the small mug of mead which I snatched from a servitor's hand and drank just now as I ascended the stairs."

"Why, good friar!" exclaimed Leofric, "two of my retainers saw you being carried on a bier to the Abbey of Roystone, and report had it that your dead body had been found in a wood."

"Then report lied, as usual, noble thane," said the friar. "Your servants may certainly have seen me being carried along on a bier, and my body may also have been found in a wood, but that I am not dead, my supper shall presently find. Two nights agone, I took shelter in the abode of a treacherous Saracen named Melchior, who is living on the domain of Sir Guy de Montferris, and, as I shrewdly suspect, is in his pay. Then, either by means of certain black arts of magic or necromancy, or else by the more ordinary way of drugging the wine he gave me, he caused me to fall senseless."

"Twas the latter method, I suspect," said Robin Hood, drily.

"Well, be he wizard or not, I shall have an account to settle with him when next we meet," exclaimed the friar. "Anyway, when I recovered my senses I found myself in an open coffin, placed in a sort of crypt beneath the Abbey of Roystone. I called out and would have arisen, when two villainous monks—half-terrified, half-surprised, doubtless, at finding me alive when they hoped that I was dead—held a cloth saturated with some vile-smelling drug over my face, and caused me to become unconscious once more."

"The miscreants!" exclaimed Robin Hood. "They shall suffer for this!"

"Whether it was their intention to kill me with this drug, I cannot say," pursued the friar, "but I wakened not

again for many hours. I then found my arms swathed down, my feet tied fast, and the place so utterly dark, and smelling so damp and mouldy, that at first I conceived it to be a tomb. It was, in truth, the dungeon pit of the abbey. Presently the door of my dungeon creaked, and there entered the same two monks as I had seen before. They would have persuaded me I was in purgatory, but I knew too well their voices, and their features, too, for the matter of that; and I shall know them again," he added grimly.

"But how did you escape, good comrade?" asked Little John. "Did the priests relent?"

"Relent!" echoed the friar. "Do rocks melt beneath the sun's rays? I should have been there still, had not some stir in the monastery summoned the swarm out of their hive. They went, and, after a time, the gouty sacristan opened the door and left me the half of a loaf and a flask of wine. I ate, drank, and was invigorated, when, to add to my good luck, the sacristan, being in too much haste to discharge his duty of turnkey properly, locked the door beside the staple, so that it fell ajar. The light, the food, the wine, give me such momentary vigour that I managed to wrench my wrists free of their bonds. After that it was easy to free my ankles, and I leaped from the coffin."

"Pause a moment, good friar," said Leofric, "and partake of a cup of mead ere you proceed with a tale so dreadful."

"That will I readily," exclaimed Friar Tuck, "and a morsel of that savoury ham were not altogether foreign to the matter also."

Willing hands attended to his needs, and presently he proceeded with his story.

He had indeed now many more auditors than those to whom it was commenced, for as many of the domestics and retainers as could squeeze round the open door had come up to listen to the narrative.

"Finding myself free," the friar continued, "I dragged myself upstairs. After much groping about I found a

side door, and so into the fresh air of heaven once again. Knowing that the residence of the noble Leofric was the nearest friendly habitation to which I could betake myself, I came here at the best speed I could compass, man and mother's son flying before me wherever I came, taking me for a spectre, the more especially as, to prevent my being recognised, I drew the corpse-hood over my face."

"By my faith!" exclaimed Robin Hood; "but 'tis a strange adventure that you have passed through. That knave abbot and his monks shall pay dearly for their villainy."

"Leave them to me," said Friar Tuck; "an I trounce them not well with my quarter-staff, may I never taste good venison again."

CHAPTER 6.

Foresters to the Rescue.

WHILE the scenes that have been described were passing in town, and lists, and forests, the Jewess, Miriam, awaited her fate in a distant and sequestered turret of the castle of Roystone.

Thither she had been led on the day on which she had been carried off by Guy de Montferris, who thought that the imprisonment would subdue the fiery spirit with which she had treated him. On being thrust into the room, which was of considerable dimensions, Miriam had found herself in the presence of an old hag, who had been sent to look after her.

At first she had attempted to win this crone's good will by speaking her fairly, but finding that of no avail she eventually relapsed into silence and despair.

When left alone she had carefully inspected the room in which she was incarcerated to see if there was any possibility of escape, but it afforded few hopes in that direction.

It contained neither secret passage nor trap-door, and, except where the door by which she had entered joined the main building, the apartment seemed to be circumscribed by the round exterior wall of the turret.

The door had no inside bolt or bar.

The single window opened upon an embattled space surmounting the turret, which gave Miriam, at first sight, some hopes of escaping; but she soon found it had no communication with any other part of the battlements, being an isolated bartizan, or balcony, whereon a few archers might be stationed for defending the turret.

As we know, the first intention of Montferris was to make Miriam a slave in his household. His hatred of the Jews was such that he found fiendish delight in the thought of humbling the proud beauty. But as time passed, Miriam's beauty appealed to the Norman more and more, until he became madly in love with her and determined to force her to accept his hand in marriage.

It was the tenth day of Miriam's captivity, when a step which she recognised as that of Guy de Montferris, who had visited her before to press his suit, was heard on the stair, and the door of the turret-chamber slowly opened, admitting the recreant knight.

"Miriam," he cried, advancing towards her, "have you relented, or will you still persist in this coldness of demeanour towards one who loves you so well?"

"I should ask, rather," exclaimed the beautiful Jewess, "have you relented, fierce knight? You speak of love to me—you, who have carried me from my home, and kept me a prisoner in this lonely chamber for days, while my sorrowing father, perhaps, mourns me as dead!"

"Not so," said Montferris, his brow flushing with anger. "He knows, or guesses, where you are, and has found a knight to champion you. We met in the lists a few days ago, pledged to mortal combat, and—perdition seized him!—had Prince John not thrown down his baton when I fell, I should not have been alive now."

"A champion who fought on my behalf!" cried the beautiful Jewess, joyfully. "Heaven bless him! And he vanquished thee, base knight? Ah! then he yet may rescue me."

"Never, maiden," replied Montferris.

"Never, I swear, shall any man rescue you from within these walls. Rather would I see you dead at my feet. Your only hope rests in me, or, I should say, in yourself, in the answer—"

"Enough," interrupted Miriam. "I have given you my answer once, and that answer will never be altered. What would you have of me? Is it my wealth you require?—for, if so, my father will gladly give all he possesses to ransom me. We can have naught in common between us—you are a Christian, I am a Jewess. Our union would be contrary alike to the laws of the church and synagogue."

"Preach not to me of the laws of the church!" exclaimed the Norman baron impatiently. "I care no more for them than for the laws of the land, which I have defied and broken by carrying you off."

"Have you no knightly honour?" demanded Miriam. "I have always heard that the laws of chivalry require that all true knights shall protect the weak and oppressed, and that women in particular should they guard from all harm and evil. Is this how you carry out your vows?"

"Laws—laws again," replied Montferris. "Prate not to me of laws and vows. The only law I obey is that of my own wishes; the only vow I will keep is the one I have taken never to give you up. You are the captive of my bow and spear, and therefore subject to my will. It is useless to defy me, for there is no one here who can help you—"

"You lie, coward and dastard! There is!"

With a hoarse growl of surprise and consternation, the Norman baron swung round on hearing these words. The door of the room was open, and on the threshold there stood an archer in Lincoln green.

It was Robin Hood!

"Who and what are you?" demanded Sir Guy de Montferris fiercely. "By your appearance you are one of those pestilent outlaws who infest Sherwood Forest, the leader of whom I have sworn to hang from his own trysting-tree as a warning to all others."

"Their leader is before you. I am Robin Hood!"

The baron changed colour, and for a moment seemed staggered. The knight's boast that he would hang Sherwood's king to his own trysting-tree if he fell into his hands seemed but a flimsy piece of braggadocio in the presence of the gallant outlaw himself, whose calm and haughty bearing put the Norman baron to shame.

However, Montferris quickly recovered his insolent demeanour, although it was not difficult to see that he was ill at ease.

"I know not how you obtained access to my castle," he said, "unless one of my followers has proved a traitor—"

"We do not accept the aid of traitors," interposed Robin Hood scornfully; then he turned to Miriam, the Jewess. "Fear no more, maiden," he said gently. "You are safe now from this villainous and dishonoured knight."

"Heaven has heard my prayer," cried Miriam, "and sent me a protector. Noble outlaw, I have often heard of you before as one ever ready to help the oppressed. Perchance, too, the gallant knight who championed me in the lists and overthrew this coward"—she pointed with scornful finger at Montferris—"has come with you to aid in my recue."

"Maiden, I am the knight who overthrew this monster in the lists at Ardale," said the outlaw.

"You!"

"You!" echoed the baron. "Fool! Your idle boast will not serve you. Within the hour you shall hang from the battlements. A nameless cur to make such a boast! I am mad to listen to it."

"My name," replied Robin Hood, "is better known, my lineage more pure, Montferris, than thine own. I am Robin Hood, Earl of Huntingdon. My father was murdered and my estates have been stolen from me, but my name and title cannot be. I live, false baron, to avenge my wrongs."

"Such prating have I heard before," sneered the Norman. "Well, the news shall soon be spread abroad, for now

you are doubly doomed. A prisoner will I hold you in my castle until the will of Prince John is known respecting you. Fool, or madman, you must be to enter thus openly into the lion's den."

"Say rather, the jackal's," retorted the outlaw; "but you are mistaken in supposing that you will hold me a prisoner, or that you will be able to divulge my secret while I live."

"Why so?"

"Because one of us will never leave this apartment alive," returned the outlaw sternly. "In the lists at Ardale you said that the day would come when we should meet again, and when there were none to part us. The day has come. In this room we fight to the death."

Robin Hood went to the door and whistled softly.

Little John and Friar Tuck appeared.

"Take charge of this maiden," said Robin Hood, leading Miriam forward by the hand, "and see that no harm befalls her. You are safe, damsel, with my gallant followers for the present, although there are many perils to pass through ere we win to ultimate safety."

"I can never be in worse plight than I have been while in the power of that miscreant," replied the Jewess. "But how can I ever thank you for your noble conduct, for risking your life on my behalf? And this worthy friar must surely be he who picked up the linen on which I had written a message craving the aid of any honourable man to effect my deliverance."

"It was, indeed, I," replied Friar Tuck, "although the fragment of linen was stolen from my person by a rascally Saracen, named Melchior. He is, as I well believe, a servant of this baron, who, if I am anything of a prophet, is about at last to meet with his deserts."

"He shall have fair play, little though he deserves it," said Robin Hood. "Guard the door well, and see that we are not interrupted."

Miriam, Little John, and the friar passed from the room. The door was closed and bolted on the outside, and Robin Hood and Sir Guy de Montferris were left alone.

"We each wear a sword," said the outlaw chief, addressing the baron, "and we are each without armour. Therefore we are in that respect equally matched."

"So be it. Look to yourself, outlaw, for your hours are numbered."

"Enough! On guard, Sir Guy de Montferris, and may Heaven defend the right!"

Without further parley they attacked each other fiercely, and very soon the chamber resounded with the sharp ring of steel.

Montferris was now wary, and was not weakened by over confidence, as perhaps had been the case in the lists, and, villain though he was, he fought well now that he was brought to bay.

After a few minutes' fighting, Robin Hood realised that he had an antagonist to contend with who well understood the use of the sword, and who would not be easily beaten. At first he acted strictly on the defensive. He was anxious to test his opponent before seeking to press home the attack. Presently, therefore, he prepared himself for a method of assault of which he fancied Montferris would be ignorant. In making it, however, he placed himself at a disadvantage, for his heel caught in a rough edge of the stone flooring, and he was thrown off his guard.

Sir Guy de Montferris noting this, and imagining the outlaw was yielding ground, rushed upon him with so little care that with a quick pass Robin Hood lunged forward and drove his sword point into the baron's body.

With a wild cry Sir Guy de Montferris reeled backwards a few paces, and then dropped down upon the floor—dead.

Robin Hood kneeled beside him and gazed into his set features and glaring eyes.

"Sir Guy," he muttered, "you have paid the penalty of your many foul and unscrupulous deeds. A brave and gallant knight you might have been, but you chose rather to live an evil and dissipated life. Your soul will have to answer for its misdeeds at a higher tribunal than that of man."

Little John burst it open. Robin Hood gave his hand to the damsel, and led her over the frail bridge to safety, while the others brought up the rear.

The men-at-arms made a final dash through the wicket and across the narrow bridge of planks in pursuit.

Seeing this, Robin Hood placed his bugle to his lips and sounded a loud and ringing call upon it. An answer came from the grove of trees at the foot of the castle hill. Then a score of foresters leaped into view, and a flight of arrows whistled through the air.

Several of the foremost of the pursuers, who were crowded on the narrow bridge, were struck by the clothyard shafts, and pitched headlong into the moat. The others, seeing this, quickly gave way, and turning, made back for the courtward, their movements being hastened by a second flight of arrows which laid several more of them low.

With a loud shout of triumph the reinforcements closed up to Robin Hood and his brave handful who had so gallantly effected the rescue of the beautiful Jewess, and a few minutes later the men on the castle walls of Roystone had the mortification of seeing the band of Sherwood foresters disappear from sight beneath the greenwood trees.

Three miles from Roystone the outlaw chief called a halt in a grassy glade, and here by the side of a bubbling stream he and his men rested and refreshed themselves.

"I shall escort you into York myself, fair Miriam," said Robin Hood to the girl, "and place you in safety with some of your people."

"It would be endangering your life again to do so," cried Miriam, "and already you have done more than enough for my sake. If there were many more such gallant hearts as yours in Merrie England, 'twould be a happy land, indeed, and Norman oppressors would find no foothold on its shores."

"The day will yet come, maiden," replied the outlaw captain, "when our country will be rid of tyrants and oppressors, when cruel laws will be repealed, and men of all creeds and all races will live together in amity."

"Heaven speed the day," said Miriam earnestly.

A palfrey was presently obtained for her use, and a sturdy cob for Robin Hood.

The outlaw chief, of course, had no intention of riding into York openly in his own proper person as the leader of the Sherwood foresters. Such an action would have exposed him to instant arrest.

He was going disguised as a monk of Roystone Abbey, and the lovely Jewess being heavily veiled, and changing her own garb for that of a Norman maid, would excite no comment; whereas a monk and a Jewess riding through the streets of the town would bring upon them very undesirable attention.

The ride to York was made without any incident worthy of being recorded taking place, and Miriam was placed by Robin Hood in the care of her father, who, as good fortune would have it, was staying in that city at the house of a relative.

Solomon of Sheffield, overjoyed at having his daughter restored to him, would have loaded Robin Hood with presents, but the gallant outlaw would have none of them, at least for himself.

"To my followers only do I consider you are indebted," he said. "It was a fortunate day for you, Solomon, as it has since chanced, that you were made captive by the burly friar, for had you not been brought to our camp we should have known naught of your daughter's peril, and could not therefore have gone to her rescue. The amount of your ransom, then, should be paid to the friar on behalf of the band."

"Double the amount will I pay," exclaimed the Jew, "for this is surely a day of rejoicing. A quittance will I give thee showing that I am in thy debt to the extent of a thousand crowns, and payment can be made to anyone whom thou shalt appoint to receive the money."

Robin Hood did not fail to accept this document at once, for it occurred to him that if he left the matter over for a few days the Jew might repent of his generosity.

Miriam, who by that time had learned that Robin Hood was none other than Robin Strongbow, spoke her farewells to Sherwood's king alone, and it may be that as the eyes of the beautiful Jewess rested for a moment on the form of the handsome outlaw chief, and her hand lingered in his, there was a look upon her face that was something stronger than mere gratitude.

However that may be, she gave him but scant opportunity for observing it, for she quickly veiled the flashing glance by bending her head and drooping her eyelids.

"Perchance!" she said, "we may never meet again. Lest that be so, I will ask you to accept this token in remembrance of the peril through which we have passed together."

She drew a ring from her finger, curiously carved and set with a single brilliant of amazing lustre. Robin Hood accepted the gift, and raising the hand of the fair donor to his lips, bade her farewell with never an inkling of the further adventure awaiting him on his journey back to his camp.

CHAPTER 8.

Robin's Arrest and Escape.

"SIR PRIEST, you are our prisoner!"

A hand was laid on the bridle of the cob which Robin Hood was riding, and four men-at-arms barred his progress.

"A prisoner!" he cried. "For what?"

"That is a question which it is not for us to answer," replied the spokesman. "But without a doubt it will be answered by the governor of York Castle, whither we are to convey you."

Robin Hood glanced to right and left. There were other men-at-arms standing near, and as he was some distance from the outskirts of the town he saw that escape just then was quite out of the question.

"Lead on," cried Robin Hood; "I am quite able to answer for myself. A poor monk attached to the Abbey of Royston has little enough to fear."

"That remains to be proved," said the man at arms grimly.

Robin was made to dismount, and they started then in the direction of

York Castle. In fifteen minutes they arrived there, and Robin Hood was at once taken under guard to the governor's office.

The governor was seated before a small table, on which were spread some parchments. He was a sour-looking noble, one of Prince John's closest adherents, as indeed all those who held any position of power or trust in that part of England then were.

"Of what am I accused?" demanded Robin Hood. "And why am I, a peaceful priest, arrested in the streets of York as though I were a common malefactor?"

"We have reason to doubt that you are a peaceful priest," said the governor drily. "It is not the cowl that makes the monk. Word has just been brought to us of the murder of Sir Guy de Montferris, and the escape from the castle of a certain Jewess—"

"That is passing strange," interposed Robin Hood, "for here in this city the baron stated publicly that he knew naught of the Jewess, whom he had been accused of abducting; and he repeated that statement in the lists at Ardale, and to support that statement he engaged in single combat with the Knight of the Scarlet Arrow."

The governor changed colour, for he saw that he had admitted more than he ought to have done. However, he proceeded in cold, measured tones.

"It is enough that the baron has been murdered, and a Jewess has quitted the castle. I cannot enter into any controversy with a prisoner on this subject. We do not suspect the Jewess of having committed the deed, and no further action will be taken against her; but she was seen but a short while ago to enter a house in this city where her father is at present staying, and you, a Christian monk, escorted her thither, and entered the house with her. This is a circumstance of so suspicious a nature that we decided to have you arrested and detain you a prisoner until the Abbot of Royston can be communicated with. Doubtless he will come up here to see if you are truly a monk from the abbey, or an impostor, as we shrewdly suspect."

"I have no fear but that the Abbot of Roystone will recognise me," returned Robin Hood.

There was a double meaning to his words which the governor did not comprehend. It was sure enough that the abbot would recognise him, for he had good cause to remember Robin Hood of Sherwood, having once been the prisoner of the merry outlaws, and having had to pay a round sum in ransom ere they would set him at liberty.

"Well, until he, or someone deputed by him, arrives," pursued the governor, "you will be detained in close custody. Such are my orders, though, by the mass, had I my way I would deal with you in a more summary manner."

He turned to the men-at-arms who were in attendance.

"Remove him to the chamber which has been prepared for him," he said.

Robin Hood made no further reply, for the sufficient reason that he knew it would be a waste of breath to do so, and his guards led him away along several passages until they at length entered an evil-smelling hole, which, as far as the captive could see, was about eight feet square and six feet high. On one side was a heap of straw, on another a bench.

A loophole in one of the side walls gave the only light and air which entered the place.

"Are you hungry?" asked his gaoler, after he had been delivered over to that worthy's charge by the men-at-arms.

"I was before I entered this hole," said Robin Hood. "I cannot eat here."

"There have been as good as you who have eaten here," came the gruff reply. "I had thought perhaps you might have cared to pay for a good supper, but, since you are so churlish, you must e'en make the best of the fare provided—bread and water."

With that the gaoler quitted the cell and closed the door, and Robin Hood heard the bolts being shot into their sockets.

As may be imagined, he was left a prey to no very pleasant reflections. He had been in many a desperate situation before, and his life had been many times in imminent peril, but some loop-

hole of escape had usually presented itself, whereas now he saw none.

True, his followers knew that he had come to York, and if he did not reappear among them within a stated time they would certainly start out in search of him.

But would they be able to learn that he was a prisoner in York Castle, and, what was more to the point, would they be in time?

For Robin Hood guessed that when the Abbot of Roystone appeared upon the scene, and stated who he really was, there would be but short shrift for him.

It would depend greatly on whether the abbot's movements were leisurely or hurried. He might arrive at York Castle on the following day, or it might be several days ere he journeyed there.

Twenty-four hours passed. Robin Hood's diet during that time had consisted solely of bread and water brought in by the gaoler, who was the only person who visited him.

He was a man of powerful build, and apparently great strength, but, notwithstanding this, Robin Hood had the idea once or twice, should a favourable opportunity occur, of endeavouring to overpower him, take away his keys, and seek a means of escape from the castle.

On reflection, however, he decided that the experiment was not likely to succeed, for the reason that it was scarce possible he could pass out of the castle unchallenged.

To be recaptured would leave him in worse plight than before.

While the outlaw was seated on the wooden bench, turning over many projects in his mind, a cross-bow bolt came flying through the loophole, and, striking the wall on the opposite side, fell to the floor.

Stifling a cry of joy, Robin Hood sprang forward and picked up the bolt. A scrap of parchment was attached to it, and on this a message had been written. It was to this effect:

"A follower of Leofric the Saxon saw you arrested and conveyed to York Castle, and one of the governor's attendants being a close friend of his he learnt which cell you had been taken

to. Therefore we are able to send this message. The warder, we have learned, always visits you alone, and his last visit to your cell takes place about two hours after sunset. You must seize that opportunity to attack and overpower him. You must quit the cell and make your way to the angle in the boundary wall nearest to the tower in which your cell is situated, taking care to move cautiously, though I am told there will be few about in that part of the castle at that hour. You will there find a rope hanging. On the other side of the wall you will find friends.

“WILL SCARLET.”

“Gallant Will! trust me, I will be cautious,” muttered Robin Hood, as he tore up the missive. “By the mass though, I would willingly have had something more substantial to eat than dry bread ere I engage in a struggle with my burly gaoler; but I must e'en make the best of it. He is a north countryman, and will surely know some tricks of wrestling, but, as I have no weapon, I must trust to the strength of my limbs.”

Eagerly he waited for the time when the last visit of the gaoler would be made. Never did minutes seem to drag along so wearily!

At length, after much dreary waiting, he heard the footsteps of the gaoler in the passage; then came the clanking of keys at the door, and a second later the man entered.

Instantly Robin sprang upon him. The lantern fell to the floor with a crash, and was at once extinguished; but they were not left altogether in darkness, for there was a spluttering torch in the corridor which shed some light through the open door.

The gaoler was a powerfully-built man, and bigger in every way than Robin Hood, although the latter was tall and very strongly made. The outlaw knew, too, the moment the other placed his hands upon him that he was a wrestler.

By his antagonist's movements, Robin Hood knew he was preparing for the “lion throw,” and braced himself to oppose it. Thus it was, when the gaoler

thought to accomplish his purpose, the outlaw was ready for him, and for a moment held him at an advantage. But he knew that every power he possessed would have to be used, and while he had the advantage, therefore, he gripped his opponent for a hug.

Had the gaoler been a weaker man his ribs would surely have cracked under the pressure.

So they fought on; now here, now there, about the stone floor of the cell. At times one had a slight advantage, at times the other.

“By Saint Cuthbert!” muttered the gaoler. “He is my match.”

For a time Robin Hood acted on the defensive until he should be able to try a throw which he had often practised with Little John and others in the forest glades.

Presently he thought his opponent's grip was less mighty, but he was not sure, for never in his life had he been held by such a man.

It was a hard and terrible struggle. He saw balls of fire flash before his eyes, while his sinews seemed likely to snap at any moment.

The gaoler's grip grew weaker, however, in spite of his frantic struggles. He panted like a mad dog, for he realised then for the first time that he had met his master. Then, with all the strength of his shoulders, back, and loins, Robin Hood used the trick he had intended, and the gaoler, giant though he was, went flying across the room, his head striking the floor with a terrible thud.

For a moment the outlaw was afraid that he had killed him, and he would have been grieved indeed had that been the fate of so gallant a foe. But on looking closer at him he saw that the man was only stunned, and that he would probably recover in a short time.

There was not a minute to lose. Robin had flung off his monk's gown before the struggle commenced, so hastily stripping off the gaoler's jacket he put it on; then closing the door he made his way in silence along the passage to the lower part of the tower.

Ten minutes later he reached the angle in the wall spoken of in Will

Scarlet's letter, where he saw the end of a rope hanging. Without hesitation he climbed up, and a few seconds later stood on the top of the wall.

Looking beneath him, he saw three horses saddled, and two men holding them.

At that moment his heart gave a great leap, for he heard a cry coming from the cell in the tower. The gaoler had recovered his senses and was giving the alarm.

Robin Hood pulled up the rope, dropped it down on the outer side of the wall, and slid down it.

"Quick, Robin!" cried a voice which he recognised as Will Scarlet's; "the hounds will be in full cry after us presently, and we must get a good start or we shall be overtaken."

Will's companion was Roger Derwent.

"By my faith!" exclaimed Robin Hood, as he swung into the saddle of the horse that was being held for him.

"I have just had as tough a struggle as I ever remember in my life. I am not like to forget it in a hurry."

The other two had mounted by this time.

"We must ride hard," said Roger Derwent.

Robin Hood gave a glad cry, for once more he breathed the air of freedom. Outside the frowning walls of the grim castle the spring breeze seemed so sweet and fresh!

They rode away at speed, and the hoofs of their steeds rang out on the hard highway. Soon the outskirts of the city were passed, the open country was gained, and two hours later the gallant outlaw chief was being greeted by his loyal band, who were all astir to meet him.

"Long live Robin Hood, King of Sherwood Forest!" they shouted, and the forest glades took up the cry and echoed it among the giant oaks of the outlaw's domain.

THE END.

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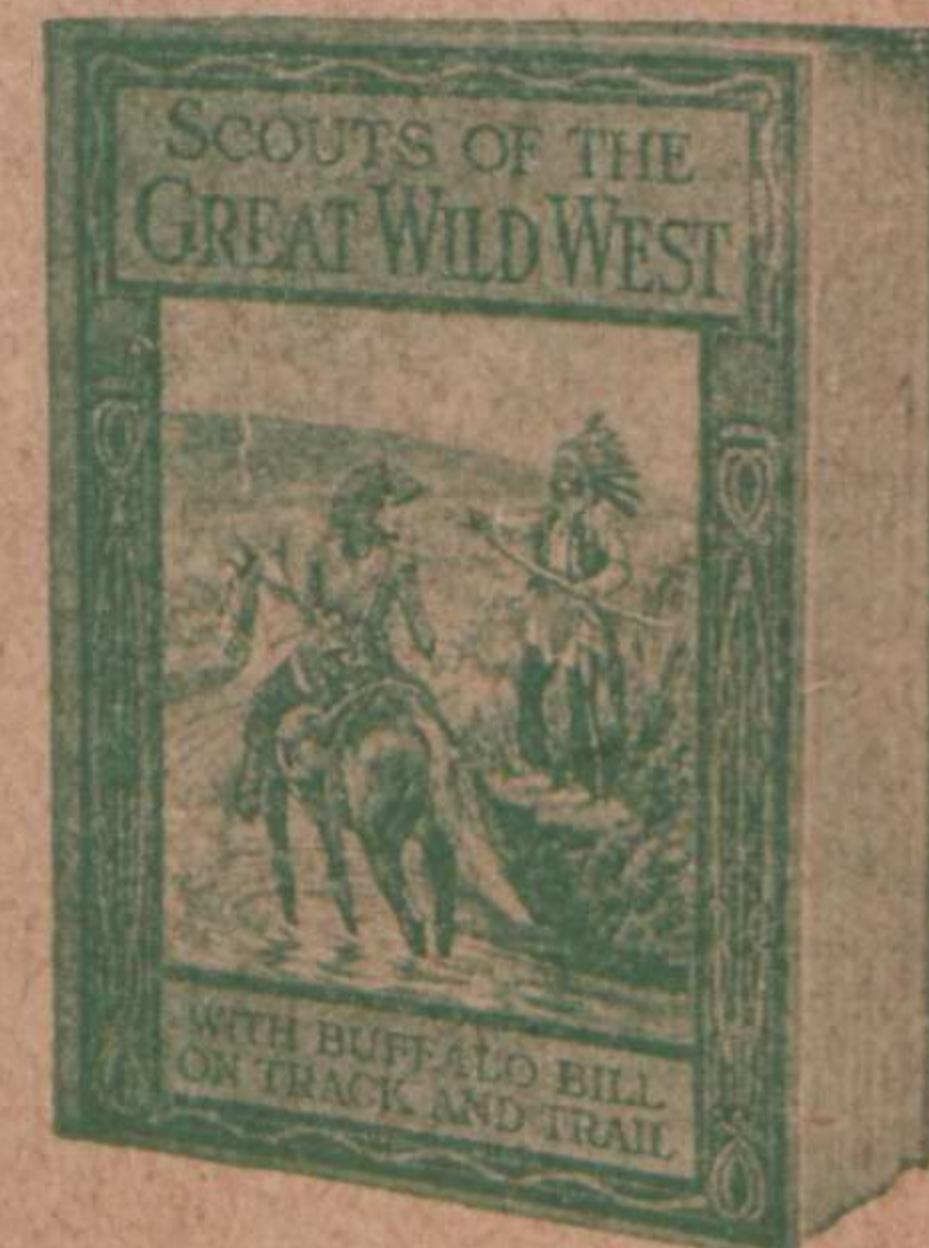
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